

IDEAS AT *Work*

COMPUTERS/HILLEL SEGAL

'PaperJet 400' cures laser printer hassles

If your office uses the popular Hewlett-Packard LaserJet printer, then your secretary — and everyone else who operates the printer — has probably developed a high tolerance for frustration. Every few minutes they are inserting or taking out letterhead paper, replenishing the paper tray and fiddling with sheets that come out in the wrong order.

There is a better way. Ziyad, a company that specializes in paper-handling devices, offers the PaperJet 400. It sits underneath the H-P LaserJet and is ingeniously devised to eliminate almost all minute-to-minute paper hassles.

Here's what it does:

- ✓ Increases the paper tray capacity of the H-P machine from about 100 to about 400.

- ✓ Allows different kinds of paper stock to be fed from any one of three trays automatically, so a two-page letter gets a letterhead from tray one for the first page, a plain bond sheet from tray two for the second page, and an envelope from tray three. This is done by inserting hidden codes in your document.

- ✓ Automatically flips the pages as they come out of the printer so they're in the right order.

All this lets you run long printing jobs without constantly attending to the computer; allows you to switch back and forth between printing letterheads, plain second sheets and envelopes without constantly removing the H-P LaserJet's single-paper tray and changing the paper; and helps to eliminate time-wasting recollection of sheets.

The major drawback is the cost. At \$1,495, the price of the PaperJet 400 approaches the price of another laser printer. A used laser printer typically sells for less than \$1,500. My first reaction was, "It's so expensive, how can it be justified?"

To find out, I proceeded to obtain a machine for testing. After having it hooked up to one of my favorite IBM-PC compatible com-

puters — the AT&T 6300 — it was used over several weeks for a variety of laser printing tasks.

When it worked easily, which was only about half the time, everyone loved it. For multipage letters done again and again, the labor-saving benefits of the device were appreciated. I concluded that for law offices and other kinds of businesses that have a great deal of repetitive, multipage correspondence, it would be great.

On the other hand, for the other half of the time, the PaperJet 400 was ignored. This was because my office used the printer for a variety of printing tasks, and people found it easier to insert different types of paper manually in the H-P LaserJet's single paper tray than to insert the proper hidden codes within the document being printed, test the output to make sure the code placement and syntax is correct, make the corrections necessary, and finally output the finished document using the PaperJet.

Another drawback: For novice users, the PaperJet 400 is often more frustrating than using the H-P LaserJet by itself. You have to learn how to deal with paper jams, warning beeps and system resets. Someone in your office needs to become the resident expert in order to support all other users of the device, and this person needs to be available whenever a novice gets near the machine.

As a result, except in high-volume situations where you have the repetitive printing of multipage letters and someone who can serve as your in-house expert, it's hard to justify the cost of the machine.

By the way, Hewlett-Packard recently announced a new, smaller version of the H-P LaserJet, which has a larger paper tray and automatically flips the pages as they are printed so they come out in the right order. As a result, I suspect that the Ziyad device will be dropping in price in the coming months, and will become a better buy for owners of the current model.



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